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CANADIAN FILM INSTITUTE

BULLETIN

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Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year

Comox Junior Society

Lewis and Mary Anderson

Comox Junior Film Society has entered its third year with almost fifty members. (Comox is a community of approximately 800 on the east shore of Vancouver Island.) There will be six monthly meetings. Membership is quite voluntary and costs three dollars. The students organized their own membership drive with the knowledge that we could not operate with fewer than thirty-six members. It was interesting to watch the enthusiasts counting them on the first night.

The junior society was the natural offspring of the Comox Film Society which has met for five years in our living room, and now meets in a hall. In previewing films for this adult group, we had allowed our two -- and later three -- teenage children to see many, though not all, of the films we viewed. We were delighted at their interest and discrimination. We wanted more of their friends to benefit.

The first year of our effort was hard. Our eldest child was among the youngest of the members; neither he nor we knew the older students. We are not familiar with children older than our own. Indeed we were a little afraid of them all and how they might react.

We had help from Allan Thomas (University of British Columbia Extension Department) and Dorothy Burritt (Liaison Officer for the Canadian Federation of Film Societies) in programming. MR. HULOT'S HOLIDAY and MAN OF ARAN were popular only with a minority; the first was a satire on an unfamiliar theme, the second was voted too "slow". SHANE, OLIVER TWIST, and THE CHILDHOOD OF MAXIM GORKI were very successful. THE GHOST GOES WEST aroused much hilarity but was rated afterwards as not being particularly funny! The shorts included SPRUCE BOG, THE RIVAL WORLD, OUT, RHYTHM OF A CITY. They were often interrupted by latecomers and seemed to leave little impression. We felt our audience was often expecting nothing, was not used to interesting documentaries before a feature film, and got little from these. We vowed to introduce them more carefully and discuss them more fully in the second year. Time for discussion has always been inadequate. But we felt we would lose our audience if we cut down on the length of our entertainment.

The second year we had only thirty-six students and had to be heavily subsidised by Comox United and Anglican Churches who had acted as guarantors. But we had a much keener group who were helpful, punctual and regular in their attendance. We had excellent group discussions on a few points set out on printed slips -- and helped along by cocoa and buns.

We began to find out what kind of films were popular. There was a general request for action. It

A scene from EMILE AND THE DETECTIVES A German language feature film for children with English subtitles Available from CFI.

seemed that these older children did not want to see films about people younger than themselves; CRIN BLANC and THE GREAT ADVENTURE were liked only by a minority. LILI and MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY were very successful; the CRIMSON PIRATE was a riot. One of their own requests was THE GOLDITZ STORY which we adults found very artificial; and although it was well enjoyed, they were quick to note that it did not give a very realistic picture of life in a prison camp. Shorts that second year were: IT'S A CRIME, CITY OF GOLD, THE RINK, HIGH WALL, PANTOMIMES. They were well appreciated.

This season we have had an excellent start with NINOTCHKA and THE WAGES OF FEAR. We go on to HAMLET, SCOTT OF THE ANTARTIC, THE TRUE GLORY, BACK OF BEYOND and TIME OUT OF WAR. We had a group of enthusiasts to the house to see and discuss SONG OF CEYLON which they thoroughly enjoyed, though all agreed that it would not be suitable for the majority of members!

In previous years we have had grades nine to twelve. This year some grade thirteens have joined. A committee from the students help with arrangements and advise on the type of film they think suitable. Evaluation slips are distributed and very faithfully filled in.

We have our problems. It is difficult to program for a group, some of whom are children and some are not; some are tremendously receptive, some far less so. A few are highly sensitive and excitable; others are thoroughly hardened and desensitised by constant exposure to movies and T.V. We are short of time, money, helpers and projectors. We are convinced, however, that this kind of work -- to introduce this new, lively, and readily available medium to students who in this beautiful but somewhat isolated place have only limited opportunities to enjoy any art -- is most rewarding. We have much to learn, but we have found that less than three years of a Junior Film Society has produced a group of young people with a true enthusiasm for good film, and an ever increasing ability to recognize it.

Films for Children

Because of the widespread interest in films for children, this special Christmas issue of the BULLETIN focusses on achievements in children's film programming in western Canada. Later issues will feature outstanding achievements in other parts of Canada, especially the extensive program in the province of Quebec

"The problem of raising the general taste of film audiences can be solved only by raising their taste at the emotional stage of their development, between the ages of seven and eleven, by means of first-class children's entertainment films."
Mary Field: Good Company.

"One of the achievements of modern psychology concern the peculiar nature of the child, who is no longer consedered as a miniature adult, but rather as a different biological and psychological realty." Henri Storck: The Entertainment Film for Juvenille Audiences.

BRIEFS FROM THE WEST

Port Arthur, Ontario: Mrs. M. Davis, Film Convenor for the Port Arthur Home and School is developing an evaluation of the suitability for children of current commercial film fare based on reports of the Film Estimates Board of National Organizations, Parents' Magazine and the British Monthly Film Bulletin. It is expected that these ratings will be published in this city's newspaper.

Atikokan, Ontario: Representatives of the Atikokan Recreation Council and the Home and School Council are working towards providing a series of children's entertainment films for their youngest citizens.

Fort Frances, Ontario: Sportsmen Clubs sponsor shows for children that draw an attendance of 700 youngsters.

Winnipeg, Manitoba: Mrs. Helen Robertson, Supervisor of Children's Services in the Winnipeg Public Library, has been presenting a successful series of children's film programmes in the Library. An account of her experiences appears on page 4. The Winnipeg Art Gallery which is presenting a series of films for its members is developing a program for its members' offspring.

St. James, Manitoba: Having experimented with film showings for "Y" day campers, Mrs. Helen Wright of the St. James Public Library plans an extended programme this season.

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: The Children's Film Library Committee has actively assisted in the programming of special children's films at Saturday morning shows for the past 8 years. Each theatre in Saskatoon participated in the program permitting the weekly show to rotate among the Saskatoon theatres.

Melfort, Saskatchewan: In co-operation with the Home and School Association, The Junior Film Council of Melfort presents a programme of children's films in the civic centre. Family memberships of $1.00 permits the entire family of children to attend. In this town of approximately 3,000 attendance has run as high as 500 it has been reported.

Edmonton, Alberta: Edmonton young people see children's films through the work of the Recreation Division which sponsors summer screenings. In addition, the Allied Arts Council presented a special showing of children's films in the Jubilee Auditorium one afternoon this past summer.

Calgary, Alberta: The Calgary Film Society will explore the possibilities of establishing a Junior Film Society under the sponsorship of the adult group.

A.F. Key, Managing Director of the Calgary Allied Arts Council, plans to extend the Council's Saturday children's program to include the regular presentation of good children's enteratinment films.

Vancouver, British Columbia: 190 children enjoy children's film programmes at the Oakridge Shopping Centre. These membership showings for eight to twelve year olds have replaced the Junior Film Club operated by the Film Council at the Art Gallery.

The City Museum is commencing a series of Saturday showings for children which are designed as a part of the Museum program for young people.

Victoria, British Columbia: interest in developing children's film showings has been expressed by the Greater Victoria Art Gallery and the Public Library.

Comox, British Columbia: Dr. and Mrs. L.S. Anderson are presenting their third season of outstanding films for the Junior Film Society. The Andersons write of their experiences on page 6.

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The Canadian Centre of Films for Children is a voluntary organization promoting the enjoyment and appreciation of film as entertainment for children. Administered by the Canadian Film Institute at 1762 Carling Avenue, Ottawa 3.

A number of the Bulletin's readers will know of Jay Macpherson of Toronto's Victoria College as author of the Boatman. The Christmas greeting featured on the first page is a Christmas card design by Miss Macpherson.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM A FILM SHOWING FOR CHILDREN

By Helen S. Robertson
Supervisor of Children's Services
Winnipeg Public Library

For two years now we have had film showings in our boys and girls departments. Every six weeks we have three films, no oftener, lest the 'special favour' feeling is lost. Usually these are chosen with some subject in mind -- hunting in the fall, canoeing in the spring, Indians, fishing, horses in the summer. The change in seasons is beautifully shown in a number of films -- my favorite being WIND FROM THE WEST for the spring, with its splendidly photographed rushing water. THE LEGEND OF THE RAVEN is for winter, a film of carved Eskimo figures with its haunting background of chanting rhythm. INDIAN CANOEMEN is for Canadian summer and the vivid LOON'S NECKLACE for fall. Then of course there are a great many favorites good for any time of year, THE STORY ABOUT PING, STONE SOUP, ROYAL AIR FORCE POLICE DOG TRAINING, BRONCO BUSTERS, THE ROMANCE OF TRANSPORTATION, WONDERS OF THE DEEP, THE STORY OF PETER AND THE POTTER, THE MUSICAL RIDE, CORRAL and CHRISTMAS IN SWEDEN, specially for the Christmas season.

While planning a film showing we have found it wiser to have the black and white films first, and the coloured ones last. Our showings are not longer than forty minutes at the most-a 10 minute, 20 minute arrangement is good. If you have small children (and you will) show their film first (anything from the Story Book Parade series is good). We don't worry to much about the variety of ages we have in every group; we have found all ages enjoy a good film. Before we take them into the screening room, we give them the titles of the films and a brief explanation of what each is about. This is important as it is an added pleasure for a child to have an idea of what is coming.

I have often been asked if we relate films and books. It would be very nice and tidy if we could say we do -- but up until now we have never found an obvious appeal very successful, as for example, displaying books on China after showing SAMPAN FAMILY. The connection between films and books seems to be more subtle than that; perhaps three weeks after the film, a boy will see something on the shelf that will remind him of SAMPAN FAMILY and he will take it out. In this way, the relationship is established.

What to look for when choosing a good film for children is much the same thing we look for in choosing a good book for children. If it is a story film, it must have a good plot. It must have adventure so a child can place himself in the setting and feel quite capable of doing what the character in the film is doing; for example in WIND FROM THE WEST any boy would be thrilled to change places with Nils. It must not talk down to a child. A good film can be enjoyed by both adults and children; in fact I could go further and say a good film for children will always be enjoyed by adults. The commentary is important -- both in its text and the voice of the commentator. We have sometimes regretfully decided not to show a film with fine photography because its text is so unsuitable.

Never choose a film because it will supplement a school curriculum; if it inadvertently does so, so much the better. This must be a secondary consideration in a library showing. Also beware of too descriptive films -- I think of the story of the boy reviewing a book on penguins. He said: "It tells me more about penguins than I wanted to know". This is also true of too many films; they keep on and on, telling you more than you wanted to know.

Once we showed CHAIRY TALE to a group of children at one of our branches. They enjoyed it so much we showed it the next week to another group at another branch, confidently waiting for the expected roars of laughter. None came -- these children stared at it in solemn silence, trying to find the story or the hidden meaning in it I guess. Sophisticated films like this are hard to judge, and sometimes the only way to tell if children will like them or not is to try them.

I can't finish without mention of cartoons. We don't have them, not because we object to cartoons as such, but children may find them elsewhere. We go under the assumption that when a boy or girl comes to the library for films he may expect to see something special that he might not see otherwise. It is up to the librarian to see he is not disappointed.

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ALBERTA LEADS

The province of Alberta has the basis of a remarkable program for teaching film appreciation. Schools are able to show feature-length films which have been approved by the Department of Education to student assemblies.

In addition, the Senior High School Curriculum Guide for English Literature and Language encourages the study of motion pictures. The English Language 20 course states that the motion picture "pre-empts, and will no doubt continue to pre-empt, a substantial portion of the student's out-of-school time; that it furnishes a major theme of conversation; that it entertains, informs, converts; that it influences in many subtle ways the opinions, attitudes, emotions and behaviour of youth."

Topics outlined and supported with suggested activities include: motion picture reviews, advertisement, motion pictures and books, propaganda, music, script writing, censorship, motion pictures and our personal lives.

CLASSROOM FILMS, LANGUAGE ARTS, SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE, CREATIVE ARTS.

ANIMAL FRIENDS

1 reel Col. $110 B&W $60

The adventures of a kitten and her friend, a big white dog, as they eat and play together. Stresses such moral and spiritual values as friendship, consideration, and helpfulness.

"Delightfully amusing and effectively done." Science Teacher

FARM BABIES AND THEIR MOTHERS

1 reel Col. $110 B&W $60

A visit to a farm to see the animal mothers and their babies -- cow and her calf, sow and piglet, mare and colt, cat and kittens, hen and chicks, and dog and puppies.

"Excellent sound effects of mother and babies add to the realism and interest of this film." Audio-Visual Instruction.

ANIMAL HABITATS

1 reel Col. $110 B&W $60

Presents different kinds of habitats in which animals live and covers the adaptations that animals make to their habitats.

"An outstanding production highlighted by numerous excellent close-ups of animals." Film World.

STORY OF THE GOOSE AND GANDER

1 reel Col. $110 B&W $60

Story of a pair of geese on a goose farm as they weed the cotton field and raise their family.

"A realistic picture of a goose farm. Should be popular and useful at any grade level through the third." EFLA Evaluation

ZOO FAMILIES

1 reel Col. $110 B&W $60

Introduces the child to the various zoo animals, stressing the family relationship between animal babies and their parents.

"Recommended for the entertainment and/or instruction of kindergarteners." Audio-Visual Resource Guide.

ANIMAL FILMS
from
Grover-Jennings Productions

FOREST BABIES 11½ min. sd. col. 1959 $115.00
BADGER'S BAD DAY 11½ min. sd. col. 1959 $115.00
(Purchase price includes a 35mm colour filmstrip & set of black and white 8x10 study prints).

Two charming animal stories which will delight children from kindergarten through upper elementary grades in language arts, science and social studies. Natural sounds add dimension to the narration.

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It is perhaps especially appropriate in this holiday issue that we feature an article by Fred Holliday of the Visual Education Branch of the Saskatchewan Department of Education. And what more appropriate a time to thank Mr. Holliday for his generous out-of-pocket contribution which has permitted the Institute to acquire a new wall screen for the CFI's screening room. Thanks, Fred.

PICTURE BOOK PARADE

Five Weston Woods films represented American films for children at the Brussels Fair last year. Both LENTIL and THE LITTLE RED LIGHTHOUSE were chosen for this year's Moscow colour TV exhibit. Of all films auditioned, the "Picture Book Parade" films were selected as 'truly children's films'. They are from two delightful American picture books for children, "Lentil," by Robert McCloskey (Viking), and "The Little Red Lighthouse," by Swift and Ward (Harcourt, Brace). Canadian Film Institute is most happy to distribute the films and filmstrips in the "Picture Book Parade" series in Canada for sale, rental and television. The films are available for free preview at any time.

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As a result of the Regina movement, Junior Film Societies have sprung up at smaller points in Saskatchewan and letters of enquiry have now been received in connection with the establishment of 3 or 4 additional points this season.

REGINA JUNIOR FILM SOCIETY

In the past there have been various attempts to provide suitable programmes using the Children's Film Library and the local theatres on Saturday mornings. We might say that at one time we had a tremendous organization of parents, teachers and business men that gave freely of their time to make the movement a success. We were let down badly by the film exchanges on so many occasions that the committee reached a stage at which it could not carry on any longer. Although approved children's films were booked well in advance and the confirmations received from the film exchanges in Winnipeg and Toronto, these films were frequently substituted for at the last minute even after our advertising through the press and over the air had been completed. This practice became so common that members of the various groups supporting the movement got fed-up and the programme gradually died. It was then that the few of us that still believed in the value of this type of entertainment re-organized in the 16mm field using school auditoria for Children's Film Society.

In a sense this has given us wider scope and strangely enough over the years we have maintained the interest and support of the Motion Picture Exhibitor's Association in this city who do not look upon our efforts as being competitive but offered us assistance from time to time. Our experience with children's films has brought many of us to a very firm decision. The greatest care has to be exercised in the adaptation of a Hollywood production for a children's programme. Generally speaking, and there are hardly any exceptions, most Hollywood productions are made for adult consumption with box office interest uppermost.

The various committees with whom I have worked in the last fifteen years have disagreed widely with the so-called findings of the Wiggle Test. There is such great danger of adults thinking that they know what children like for entertainment because there is a successful Wiggle Test associated with the presentation of a particular film -- this is no criterion that children are going to get the best entertainment from this film. Our procedure has been to have regular previews of our selected features to which a number of children are invited. We have prepared very simple children's evaluation forms which they fill out in a room completely devoid of adults or their influence. They are given time to discuss amongst themselves the pros and cons of the feature and their rating is given our earnest consideration. Curiously 9 times out of 10, their decision is far removed from that of the adult evaluation. With all due respect to those who give their time and labour in this movement, these same people have a lot to learn with regard to which children enjoy and what they do not enjoy.

During the last few years we have concentrated on those films with which Miss Mary Field has been associated and which we have been able to obtain from the Rank Organization of Canada. These are the same films that have been show to the Odeon clubs in Great Britain.

There is no need for us to advertise now on any great scale. The youngsters appreciate and look forward to each season's programme. Last season, in competition with us on Saturdays were a Children's Concert Group, a Children's Theatre group, programmes of the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A.; yet our ticket sales were bigger and better than ever -- so much so that we have been able to set aside a sinking fund for new 16mm equipment.

At the beginning of this 1959-60 season, our reports show that there is a membership in excess of 2,000 youngsters between the ages of 7 and 12.

We started with one school auditorium five years ago and today arrange for commissionaires, supervising parents and boy and girl projectionists in eight school auditoria every month. Membership fee is $1.00 per youngster for the season. We cater to those between the age of 7 and 12 in the hope that when they graduate from this age group they will be discriminating in their choice of entertainment elsewhere.

Our first Vice President is a boy of 12 and our second Vice President for our next season will be an able young lady of 11 who has the opportunity to speak democratically for the youngsters she represents.

It is truly said of adult films that the visuals may excite and maintain a child's mind in an active condition but the brain remains passive. The important thing to remember is that the young boy or girl should be able to identify themselves in the characters or amongst the characters portrayed on the screen. Behind the stories in the series, is a frequently good moral message and sometimes these films present moral conflicts. This is in order as long as the entertainment motive is dominant. Stories which involve children and animals, adventure and even some of the "cops and robbers" type are valuable. Slapstick comedies may be accepted if the story is coherent and there is purpose behind it.

We would strongly recommend, if we may, that in any establishment of a Canadian Centre for Films for Children, that the psychology behind the foregoing remarks be given consideration. We would like to see C.F.I. set up in this division, a library of this same material and lend its weight to the obtaining of funds for the continued production of this type of material, not only in Canada but in other nations of the world including the U.S.S.R. Here is a golden opportunity for a highly respected Canadian organization and institution to make the very first move in assisting the production of children's films which will enable the young people of all nations to look at each other as members of a World Brotherhood.